

Alyson Ball  
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Dear Committee Members,

My name is Alyson Ball and I am the proud mom of my 9 year old son, Ondrej, who is both medically complex and globally developmentally delayed. He is an incredibly empathetic and loving boy with a passion for science and building with LEGO bricks. He is the light of our family's life.

Ondrej was identified as having special needs officially at 4 months old and has been receiving services since he was 8 days old. This intensive intervention has allowed Ondrej to reach levels that would not have been remotely possible without it. The full wrap-around support of us as his family, the schools, and the community has been and will continue to be vital to his continued success and development. The principal at Ondrej's school once described him as "the poster child for the success of early intervention".

Seeing my child exceed expectations because of having been given the opportunity to start school at age 3 and receive extra time to work on skills, proves to me that when we invest in giving our students with disabilities a little extra time to achieve, it pays off majorly in the long run.

I also serve as President of the Bozeman Area Special Ed PTA and the number one most common complaint I hear about Montana's system of special education is that we are one of only 2 states in the nation that does not allow students with disabilities this crucial schooling between the ages of 19 and 21. As Montanans, we value the rights of each person to be able to achieve their dreams and contribute to our society as a whole. By giving our young adults with disabilities the chance to have two years at the end of their secondary education to focus on acquiring the skills they need to achieve their maximum potential, what we are really doing is greatly increasing their chances of being able to fully participate in all aspects of adult life and do something that is fulfilling and beneficial to their community. It is a very short period of financial investment that can and will completely change our kids' entire lives. Each person who gets a chance to envision their life as an adult and work on the skills they need to achieve that vision, is a person who is a lot less likely to drift aimlessly and end up sitting unfulfilled as their abilities and self-esteem fade away. Unfortunately, this is not even the worst fate that could await our children if they aren't given opportunity to succeed, as a hugely disproportionate number of them ultimately end up incarcerated. Not only does funding special education to age 21 make sense from a human dignity perspective but also from a financial one. It is certainly more fiscally responsible to provide these two years of education to head off potentially having to pay for someone to receive care for their entire life because they were denied the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration of funding our kids education to age 21. I dearly love living in Montana and I can't wait to see our great state join the 48 states that already have this legislation in place saying that we support the rights of our young adults with disabilities to achieve their dreams.

Sincerely,

